

FEBRUARY 4, 1990

CHOOSING THE LIGHT

The concept of liberty is characterized by the power and the permission to make choices. This is something we cherish very highly. This right carries with it the responsibility to know what the choices are in life so that we can make the right choices. Once the choices are known, then this carries with it the responsibility of making a choice. For example, once we have discovered that Jesus is the Light of world, then we have to make a choice of staying in darkness or following the Light.

After Jesus healed the man who was blind from birth he returned to the Temple area and continued to teach for a while. It was during this time He made the declarations "I AM the Door" and "I AM the Good Shepherd." After this He and His disciples withdrew from the city and it was during this time Lazarus became sick and died. You know the story of how Jesus returned to Bethany and before He raised Lazarus from death declared "I AM the Resurrection and the Life." After Jesus raised Lazarus from death and word had spread of what had happened, the religious leaders increased their resolve to kill Jesus and they even plotted to kill Lazarus. Jesus continued in the area and it was during this time that a dinner party was given at the home of Simon the leper. (See also, Matt 26) Lazarus, Martha and Mary were also there. Martha was serving the dinner. (Some commentaries state that two separate dinner were held; however, the significant events the Gospel writers recorded are identical and one can conclude there was but one dinner.) It was at this gathering Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with expensive ointment and wiped His feet with her hair. Many thought that this was a waste; however, Jesus saw it as worship and said that Mary was anointing Him for burial. He realized that the time was drawing near for His appointment with the cross.

Even in the face of threats of death Jesus went into Jerusalem on the first day of the week of Passover. This was the Palm Sunday event and His popularity was at its highest. It was also at this point that the Jewish leaders finalized their decision that Jesus must die. The high priest expressed it well, "It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish." Of course, this is what Jesus came to do: to die for us that we might live.

Upon His arrival in Jerusalem after the ride on the donkey colt, a seemingly insignificant event occurred:

JOHN 12:20-22 This does not seem to be anything unusual. Some non-Jews were visiting Jerusalem during the time of the Passover and they requested to see Jesus. However, this request seemed to be a signal that this was the time for Him to offer Himself. Listen to His reply to the request.

JOHN 12:23 In most other situations we find Jesus saying, "My hour is not yet." But here, He says, "The hour is come." Then he went on to tell why it was necessary for Him to die.

JOHN 12:24-26 Using the illustration of a seed of grain, Jesus shows how to win by losing -- how to live by dying. Jesus realized that for the full potential of the Kingdom of God to come about it was necessary to have Kingdom people to make up the Kingdom. But for that to happen it was necessary for Him to be "planted" so that others would be able to participate in the true life. Jesus literally gave up His life and we are called to follow Him. We are called to take up our cross daily and to put to death the old nature -- the self life -- so that the life of Christ can be manifest in us. In this way, the genetic imprint is passed on from generation to generation as others see Jesus in us and are drawn to Him as a result of our lives. There is a promise given here that God will honor the person who follows Jesus.

This was an emotionally trying time for Jesus. The personal anguish had already begun.

JOHN 12:27 How do we approach personal anguish and emotional pain? Do we want immediate relief and deliverance from it or can we see in the anguish the putting to death of the old nature? Is it not our "self" that hurts when things go badly for us? We need to turn our anguish over to the Lord for Him to use to bring about the changes in us that are needed. Jesus suffered the emotional pains of separation from God for our sake. In doing so, He made the way open for us to approach God. As we go about the process of taking up our cross and putting to death the sinful nature we open up ourselves for free communion with God because the veil of the "flesh" (or our basic carnality) is taken out of the way.

Dying to self by self denial can become an end in itself. Jesus wanted, and we should also want, the outcome of selflessness to be that God is glorified. This desire was reflected in the brief prayer that followed:

JOHN 12:28-30 It was important to Jesus that the proper interpretation be placed on the events of His being offered up as a sacrifice. It needed to be done in such a way that people would glorify God.

It is sometimes hard to realize that good can come from our problems. It is hard to realize that the very things in life that seem to defeat us will provide us with ultimate victory. Something of this paradox is found in the meaning of the cross.

JOHN 12:31-33 By His death on the cross, Jesus would overthrow the satanic control of the world. After the fall of Adam and before the Cross, Satan was the prince of this world. After the Cross, Satan has no claim on the world because he is a defeated foe, he is cast out. It is ironic that the very instrument of death that satan's forces used to cause the illegal death of the Son of God became the rallying point for all that would join with God in claiming the victory for the Kingdom of God.

JOHN 12:34-36 The Jews were familiar enough with the Old Testament Scriptures to know that in many places the Messiah was mentioned as coming into the world and that His reign would be forever, that He would be victorious. They had failed to realize that the Scriptures also spoke about the Messiah as being the Suffering Servant that would be our sin bearer. Here was Jesus talking about dying and also giving indications that He is the Messiah and the people were confused because they had a preconceived notion of what the Messiah was to be and do. Jesus did not answer their questions but told them that they should be using this time to learn while He was there to teach them. To walk in the light while the Light of the world was there among was the greatest opportunity that they would ever have. The same is true for us. We must walk where there is light by following in the path that Jesus walked.